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THE USE OF HISTORY FOR RESEARCH IN THEORETICAL SOCIOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

All human behavior in groups should furnish the inductive data of sociology, but historical records have not been adequately utilized. Events, movements, epochs should be studied and all recorded social behavior analyzed, classified and compared, not merely those that corroborate a special theory. The method is dubbed "socio-analysis" and is distinguished also from editorial interpretation and from the social survey by being confined to pure sociology. [A plan for this purpose is tentatively set forth, for undergraduate study and for seminar research.] Sources for a suitable schedule and suitable materials are suggested.

Contemporary social conditions, primitive races, early philosophies, and modern psychology have all now been tapped as funds of data for sociological induction. The writer wishes to urge a more thorough and more truly scientific method for utilizing fully the vast available mass of historical data for similar purposes. In fact, it is his belief that, until this be done, sociological principles will have an inadequate factual basis of human experience and behavior. The method proposed might be called the socio-analysis of history.

The usual text or seminar in social theory dips and sips from period to period and from region to region for its illustrative material. This is legitimate for educational purposes. There is danger, however, of stopping there. What scholarly justification is there if we limit ourselves to seeking and selecting bits here and there in the record, to be held up to students as having "social significance," merely because they tickle a particular pattern in our psyche, or fit a particular pigeon-hole in our classification? Every historical episode, however inconspicuous, is also a social event and a social cause, and therefore a unit of investigation subject to sociological analysis and interpretation.

In fact, sociology must include in its data any material offered by history, if it is not to forfeit its claims as a science. Either all

happenings involving socii are capable of being analyzed, classified, and clarified by means of existing formulas and methods, or the scope of so-called sociological laws and methods should be so enlarged as to make this possible.

It is not here proposed that sociology include history in the taxonomy either of the curriculum or of the sciences. It is, however, recognized that sociology has, in common with several other sciences, the whole field of human behavior as the foundation upon which it is built and as the data which it observes, classifies, and formulates. In common with the economists, politists, and psychologists, the sociologists accept (in so far as they are merely sociologists) the verdict of the historian upon the authenticity of facts of history. But it is here contended that the sociologists have not so far sufficiently capitalized this material for intensive sociological use. Individual sociologists are obviously erudite in history. But so long as they are stringing beads of anecdote on threads of principle they fall short of true historical sociology. Historical sociology should be as truly descriptive and inductive as is the social survey. On the other hand, if scholars merely attempt to follow the string of beads through the larger meshes of history, or to weave it to a single pattern, they fall into the limbo of philosophy of history. Perhaps it is an avoidance of this sort of pseudo-science which has largely prevented the sort of legitimate use of history by sociology which the writer has in mind. It is due also, doubtless, to a rather general ignorance of historical sources on the part of many sociologists. Sociologists have, in the past, been recruited from many camps other than their own. It is unfortunate that so few have come over from the army of the historians.

The analytic description of the past, which we call history, sheds little light upon the future unless we seek and find there the uniformities of behavior we call social law.

The following suggestions are with some diffidence offered as ways by which both teachers and students may enrich the breadth and depth of sociological insight, and ultimately the science itself. The writer would welcome criticism or comparative experience.

1. Major students may be encouraged to minor in history.

2. Students should be encouraged or required to illustrate social principles from known historical facts.

3. Term papers, special assignments, and undergraduate theses based on the socio-analysis of particular historical episodes, may be encouraged, especially for those who are majoring in history or other human sciences

4. An advanced course may be offered, consisting entirely in the analysis of concrete social events, current or historical, in terms of sociological categories.

5. A graduate seminar, working from year to year, might take up one historical period after another for intensive study.

It is now in order to explain more in detail what is meant by this more intensive study which I have dubbed socio-analysis.¹ This can be best shown by an illustration. The class, for example, or the individual student, may be called upon to analyze upon such an event as the Regicide Parliament of England. This project or problem is first assigned for bibliographical preparation, and sources collected are evaluated and reassigned, being subdivided if the number be large or the time and sources limited. Preference should be given to primary sources. The subject may then be prepared and presented in narrative form, and the generally accepted facts established.² The accepted data should include also the variant attitudes and opinions of the parties to the situation. Historical continuity should not be sacrificed: the general etiology of the period chosen should form the basis of the narrative and should be borne constantly in mind in the analysis. To take an episode out of its context would be like judging a man by a day or a plant by a cross-section.

¹ In *The Meaning of Social Science* (especially Lectures VI and VII), Dr. Small describes a plan of co-operative interdepartmental research, similar in its interests, but apparently too ambitious for realization in the near future.

² In this connection some good but brief critique of historical records and method such as Dr. Robinson's or Dr. Shotwell's should be read as collateral preparation. The students should also read R. E. Park, "Sociology and the Social Sciences," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XXVI, now republished as chapter i, sections 1-4, of Park and Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*; Carl Becker, "Some Aspects of the Influence of Social Problems and Ideas upon the Study and Writing of History," *American Journal of Sociology*, VIII, 641 ff.; A. W. Small, "The Subject Matter of Sociology," *ibid.*, Vol. X, esp. pp. 292 ff.; E. A. Ross, "The Unit of Investigation," *ibid.*, IX, 194 ff.

A schedule is prepared based upon the theories and classifications of any eminent sociologist; preferably, however, a composite including categories with which the student is familiar through work in less advanced courses. The topics should not be adapted exclusively to any one event, movement, type of group or situation, but should be sufficiently full and elastic to fit successive assignments, for comparative study. Nor should it beg any questions or lead any answers as to the interpretation of events and causes. This schedule should be multigraphed for use throughout the course.

The preparation of such a schedule may itself be made a seminar project, until such time as the method becomes standardized through comparative experience. Eventually, however, the form should be developed to a point of accuracy and impersonality such as will make the records worthy of preservation as a permanent cumulation for comparative research.

Dr. Giddings' schedule for group studies, issued for his seminars,¹ is a good example of socio-analysis involving, however, largely objective and "static" facts. The psychological phases of group activity might be far more intensively analyzed and the inclusion of the time element will enlarge by a whole dimension the scope and character of such analysis.

Other materials for the formation of such schedules are easily available; cf. Lester F. Ward, "The Data of Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology*, I, 742 ff.; W. I. Thomas, *American Journal of Sociology*, I, 445-46; M. Cheysson, "Monograph of the Community," *ibid.*, V, 110 ff.; E. C. Hayes, "The Classification of Sociology," *ibid.*, XVII, especially p. 394; A. W. Small, "The Scope of Sociology," *ibid.*, V, 509 ff.; VIII, 197 ff.; *General Sociology*, pp. 400 ff. The connecting outline of Giddings' *Inductive Sociology* and *Readings in Descriptive and Historical Sociology* is valuable, though the evolutionary portions of the latter can, of course, be omitted, and the remainder can be supplemented from other sources.

In all of the above, however, care should be taken not to stop with mere description of results, with classificatory labels. The emphasis should be kept upon behavior in group relations and its motivation, under types of stimulus-situation.

¹ "Principles of Sociology," Columbia University Press; a leaflet now out of print.

The schedule above suggested can, of course, be used either for the study of a group or for the study of a movement, episode, or situation. In either case the data may be current, recent, or truly historical. It is with historical socio-analysis that the present proposal is especially concerned. And, in general, periods are to be preferred to groups because the latter can hardly be treated intelligently with time and change omitted or reluctantly admitted, while the study of a period includes inevitably the groups in their real setting. The episodes selected for study in any given course or thesis should, however, be limited to such dimensions as will permit really thorough analysis so far as sources allow.

An alternative plan would be to select a particular type of group situation, say that of the group confronted with a conflict of loyalties within its membership, between its original purpose and that of another group including or included by the original group; the situation symbolized as follows:

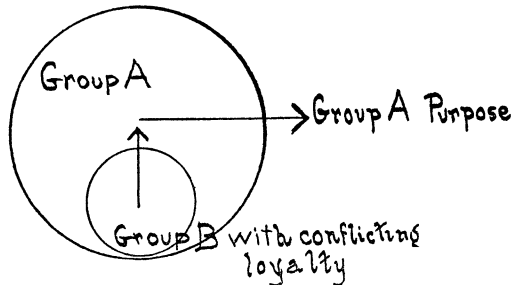


FIG. 1

History would be combed by the students through the entire period and area selected, to find similar situation patterns. These would be compared in class or seminar, the resultant behavior noted, and uniformities formulated or laws verified.

The intensive study of smaller events and groups has the advantage that, from an accumulation of such studies, a larger inductive basis for the formulation and testing of sociological laws may be hoped for. The attempts to base laws upon the larger movements, the architectonic forms in which man's comparatively brief history has been cast, have all been defective for lack of comparable data, for each phenomenon is almost unique. From

myriads of smaller groups of all kinds, throughout the world and in every age, we should be able to compare, and interpret more solidly, the phenomena of group formation and behavior.

Current or recent events are specially suitable for analysis by undergraduates, and the material is easily available. Giddings' *Readings in Descriptive and Historical Sociology*, Thomas' *Source Book*, the new text by Park and Burgess, and other similar compilations, contain useful materials for practice in this sort of work among undergraduates.

As suitable material for undergraduates to analyze, the following are suggested, merely to give a concrete idea of the writer's purpose, through familiar examples. The sources indicated are, of course, much abbreviated for the purpose of this article. The extent to which sources may be expanded for undergraduates depends on the size of class and the resources of the library.

1. The Steel Strike of 1919
 - a) The Pittsburgh Survey
 - b) Accounts of previous strikes in the locality
 - c) The Stockholders' Report
 - d) The Interchurch Reports
 - e) The Great Steel Strike—W. Z. Foster
 - f) Rebuttals
 - g) Public opinion and the press
 - h) Labor and steel journals
2. The Open Shop Crusade of 1920-21
 - a) Bulletins of the National Association of Manufacturers
 - b) Labor and trade journals
 - c) Liberal journals
 - d) Daily press
 - e) Direct correspondence
3. President Wilson's Industrial Conferences
 - a) Journals of period preceding, during, between, and following the conferences
 - b) Wilson's messages
 - c) Reports of the second conference
4. A Community Chest Campaign
 - a) Publicity
 - b) Planning documents
 - c) Direct observation
 - d) Reports of results

5. A Socialist Mass Meeting, a College Y.M.C.A. evangelical or student volunteer campaign, and a religious revival¹
6. The First Revolutionary steps
 - a) In America
 - b) In France
 - c) In Russia
7. The Haymarket Riots
8. Civil War in West Virginia
9. The Lane Plan for Soldier Colonization (1919)
10. The Student Revolt in China

Comparative material should be of particular value to undergraduates—whether the comparisons be current or historical or both. The project may be subdivided for assignment to students either by topic or by source material. Both forms of assignment have certain obvious values as discipline. A small intensive individual problem should be required as a term paper from each student. Such a course implies, of course, at least one previous course in social theory.

For graduate students, after a practice problem or two for those who have not had such undergraduate work as is outlined above, the student should select some period or episode for which detailed documentary material is available, and should interpret every minute step in the light of the entire schedule. As the scene shifts, the same schedule may have to be filled out again, so that the complete picture, like active moving pictures, will be got from a series of blending impressions.

For graduates, working as individuals, there are unlimited quantities of documents ready, authenticated by competent historians. A series of sources such as that projected some years ago by Giddings and Shotwell should prove invaluable both for teachers and for students of all grades.²

If a group of advanced students are available, a larger situation may be undertaken, and the sources, topics, or stages be subdivided among the group in some way such as will best serve both students

¹ For those following, not even abbreviated sources are here mentioned.

² Of those so far published by Dr. Shotwell, *Hellenic Civilization*, compiled by Botsford and Sihler, is probably best for the purpose here mentioned. (Columbia University Press.)

and study. Or similar episodes, assigned to each, might be closely compared. Co-operation and even a joint seminar with the history department should be useful. Units suitable for graduate analysis (for theses or joint group-study topics) might be such as the following:

1. The Code of Hammurabi
2. The Age of Pericles
3. The Revolt of the Maccabees
4. The Children's Crusade
5. The Peasant Revolt
6. The Oxford Movement
7. The Constitutional Convention (1789)
8. The Anti-Slavery Movement
9. The Origins of the Spanish American War
10. The Career of Disraeli

Here, however, the reader should note the danger of slipping back into the selective method, which is inevitably colored by the interests and ideas of the selectors.

Far preferable, if there be any chance of continuity from year to year for cumulative results, would be a systematic and exhaustive study of an entire century for an entire area.¹ Only by such methods will sociology eventually cover its possible, rightful, and required data, and, in a measure, catch up with the increasingly complex material of the present day.

It will be noted that socio-analysis is not accomplished merely by pointing out the *social economic* significance of events. That sort of thing is done, and done splendidly, by the *Survey* and other more or less liberal periodicals. This is not the same as pointing out the *sociological* significance of events. In Ward's usage, socio-analysis is in the field of pure sociology, while editorial analysis for social workers and citizens is apt to partake of applied sociology.

Nor is socio-analysis of a contemporary situation to be confused with the ordinary social survey. The usual social survey seeks and counts and formulates largely the crude physical phenomena which are considered indexes of standards, of welfare, and of

¹ Cf. A. W. Small, *The Meaning of Social Science*, VI.

efficiency. While certain facts are germane to both sorts of study, the survey as so far developed omits conspicuously the study of dynamic and psychological factors such as attitudes, types, scales of value, motives, processes; in other words it has little place for social behavior. The survey is more "practical," but would be still more so if it were able to include such material; just as case-work would be more effective if it included behavioristic or psycho-analytic studies. The survey has inclined to be more statistical than is the socio-analytic study, but this is a temporary contrast, for objective and quantitative indices in social psychology are constantly being sought and will eventually be developed and standardized. The permanent difference between a survey and a socio-analysis lies probably in the immediate planning purpose of the former and the motives of general science in the latter—curiosity, collection, analysis, comparison, classification, generalization, prophecy, experiment, eventual control.

This sort of quest is also, in some respects, a different enterprise from anything we associate with the work of such different men as Henry Adams or Wells or Buckle, or Giddings or Montesquieu or Robinson or Carleton Parker or Frazer or Thomas or Ross or Commons or Fitch or Patten or Machiavelli or Kidd. Yet there is nothing basically new about the idea. Aristotle may be said to foreshadow this sociological interpretation of history. The writer is merely urging the development of such devices as will extend our legitimate field of sociological effort and our horizon of truth.